

VSDB Advisory Commission Meeting

Department of Education
James Monroe Building
Secondary Conference Room, 23rd floor
Richmond, VA

December 17, 2002

Members Present: Senator Emmett Hanger, Jr., Senator W. Henry Maxwell, Senator Harry Blevins, Delegate Chris Saxman, Audrey Davidson, Gordon Landes, John Pleasants.

Members Absent: Delegate Robb Bell, Delegate Mary Christian, Delegate Lionell Spruill, Delegate Glenn Weatherholtz, Margaret Williams.

Others Present: Nancy Armstrong, Superintendent, VSDB-Staunton
Darlene M. White, Superintendent, VSDBM-H
Karen Trump, Director of State Operated Programs
Melinda Washington, Finance, VSDB-Hampton

Interpreters: Cat Clough
Christina Jacob

Minutes: Approved as recorded for meeting on 7-15-02.

Opening Remarks: Senator Hanger welcomed everyone to the meeting. He observed that budget reductions will affect many of the items discussed today and in the future and that the Commission will need to take appropriate actions to continue to build educational excellence for the students in Virginia with sensory impairments.

Report from the Director of State Operated Programs:

Dr. Trump referenced that at the previous meeting, the Commission had agreed to communicate with the Board of Education by participating on their agenda once or twice a year depending on the need.

Dr. Trump reported that at the last meeting she was asked to inquire about the most appropriate way for the Commission to request adoption of the “National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities”. Dr. Trump reported that the recommendation to her was that the Commission submit a request to the Superintendent of Public Instruction requesting that the Department of Education adopt the National Agenda. If further action is needed by the Board of Education, Dr. DeMary can make a recommendation in that regard. A motion was made to send a letter to Dr. DeMary with such a request. There was subsequent discussion about the nature of the document and it was the consensus of the group that the National Agenda is considered a “best practices” type of document that provides leadership for education agencies. This means localities may use it for guidance when needed but are not prohibited

from exceeding the practices suggested. It was suggested that the list of agencies that have currently adopted the Agenda be provided with the letter of request to Dr. DeMary. John Pleasants put forth for discussion the option of holding the request until a determination about the National Agenda for Deaf Education could be made. A motion was made to send the request for adoption of the National Agenda for the Blind because it had been so long since the completion of the study. It was also moved that the Commission continue the gathering of needed information about the National Agenda for the Deaf. The motions passed.

Dr. Trump distributed a copy of the recommendations that were developed and submitted to the Board of Education on behalf of the Commission about the Standards of Quality (SOQ). These recommendations were developed by the subcommittee assigned to this task. The subcommittee met on August 23, 2002. The letter was based on a review of the current Standards of Quality (SOQ) at that meeting.

Senator Hanger asked whether the National Agenda for the Blind impacted funding through the SOQ. Dr. Trump referenced the previous study conducted in that regard: House Joint Resolution 162, completed in December 2000. The study indicated that there are federal and state requirements and available resources in place to achieve seven of the eight goals. In order to fully support all eight goals, the following two areas would need to be addressed:

1. Certification requirements would need to be adopted for orientation and mobility (O & M) instructors.
2. Vision impaired (VI) teacher caseloads will need to be incorporated into the same funding system as other special education teachers through revision of the SOQ funding formula. State funds will need to be appropriated to fund the state share of the maximum caseload limits for teachers of students with visual impairments.

The goals of the National Agenda are consistent with the department's current efforts. Although the request for changes in these areas were not supported in the last biennium budget, it is anticipated that they will be resubmitted. All parties at this time are supportive of the needed changes in the future.

The topic of discussion turned to the perception that local school divisions are not working with the VSDBs, rather they are providing services through their own staff and not requesting placement or consultation services from the two schools. Currently there is less participation of blind students at the VSDBs than deaf students. Current enrollment is far less than in the past for both populations. There is information available from the school's current database with regard to which school divisions place students at the school. The amount of technical assistance provided by the VSDBs to local school divisions can be gathered. However, it will be necessary to explore the confidentiality issues about sharing that information with the Commission. It will also be necessary to determine what the intended purpose the Commission has for the information and its relevance to the mission of the group. Dr. Trump will follow up with Senator Hanger on this matter.

Dr. Trump reported that the "Parent Brochure" which is mandated by ¶22.1-217.01 has been revised and is on the way to the printer. Distribution is planned for February, 2003. The current opinion of the superintendents is that distribution of the materials should happen later in the year rather than the beginning of the school year. The beginning of the school year is not generally a good time for parents and school staff to consider a change of placement.

No action has been evidenced with regard to the Instructional Materials Accessibility Act, 2002. Federal bill HR4582 proposes improvements to the current system for printing instructional materials used by blind persons or other persons with print disabilities in elementary and secondary schools. If passed, it will implement a coordinated system that requires textbook companies to make their textbooks available electronically to a central place such as the American Printing House for the Blind. Rather than having a textbook transcribed, it would be in a format that could be converted to Braille using current software translations or read with programs like JAWS. This would reduce waiting time currently experienced by blind students in local school divisions.

Audrey asked about Project PASS and Dr. Trump gave out printed information from the department's website. Dr. Trump also distributed a synopsis of all the studies to date about the two schools in the area of consolidation that she developed for the Commission. She noted that the majority of the comments provided were copied from the reports she reviewed. The report will be presented and discussed at a later meeting. Also distributed was information about the number of students with sensory impairments served by local school divisions.

Mr. Landes wanted to know if there is a list of students that distinguishes between "hard of hearing" vs. "hearing impaired" vs "deaf". There is not. The discussion continued about information that tells the difference between a student that is deaf and one who is hard of hearing and a student that is blind and one that is vision impaired. Dr. Trump explained that for federal reporting purposes, the categories have been combined, therefore the department does not have information that is separated by each category. *Students may be classified by their local school division for purposes of providing special education services with the following labels: "deafness" and "hearing impairment". However, when the school divisions report student information for state purposes they must be combined as "hearing impaired". This federal reporting requirement took place several years ago.

Dr. Trump reported on a request made from the last meeting to examine SOL test performance of students with sensory impairments in local school divisions vs. those placed at the school. The review revealed that students in local school divisions are scoring significantly higher than students at the two schools on the state standardized testing system. There is no current information to indicate the reasons for the differences in performance on standardized testing. Dr. Armstrong expressed her belief that there are many variables that impact a student's performance such as how long a student has been receiving special education services and what type of services the student

*This information is added to the minutes as a correction of information provided at the meeting. This is done to avoid confusion regarding the correct information.

received prior to placement at the school. It was explained that currently the VSDB-Staunton is using a new approach to teaching reading and writing designed for ASL students (Fairfield Reading Program).

Ms. Davidson shared with the group about the proposed Board of Education guidelines that will permit school divisions to submit alternative standards of learning assessment or evaluation program for certain students with disabilities who cannot be accommodated on the Standards of Learning Tests. This new option permits more flexibility in modifications available for students with extenuating circumstances. This came about as a result of a request on behalf of a student who experienced a sudden onset of blindness.

Senator Hanger inquired about the designations of "Hearing Impaired" and "Vision Impaired" with regard to whether they can be broken down into various categories or levels of impairment. Dr. Trump suggested that this can be an agenda item for the next meeting with an invitation extended to Dr. Lissa Power-deFur who was assigned the task of writing the new special education regulations last year. At the VADOE, Dr. Trump is assigned to the area of Vision Impairment and Dr. Power-deFur is assigned in the area of "Deafness" and "Hearing Impairment".

Mr. Landes expressed his desire to learn more about special education services for speech impairment.

Senator Hanger initiated conversation about the current costs of special education for students with sensory impairments at the local level vs. the two schools? How do they compare? What caliber students are school divisions turning out by mainstreaming? Can the VSDBs gain better results? Are students at the VSDBs receiving more extra-curricular and daily living skills opportunities? Ms. Davidson referred to an article in the Washington Post about the costs of mainstreaming. It seems the article reported that the Commonwealth of Virginia does not have sufficient funding for the needs of students in the mainstream. John Pleasants remarked that it has been his experience that students with sensory impairments can do well in local school divisions but finds that residential schools offers more to each VI and HI student individually with regard to extra curricular and socialization opportunities. He further believes that a good deal of self-motivation is needed to be successful in local programs and more students benefit from the support of a residential setting and the other activities available in an emersion program that results in a well rounded student.

Ms. Davidson asked if every child who is blind or deaf is classified as a special education student. The special education process was explained with regard to identification occurs only when the student is in need of special education services. Further clarification was provided that all students at Staunton are classified as special education students and must have a current Individualized Education Program (IEP) in order to receive services.

Dr. Trump described the wide variety of resources available to the local school divisions including a description of the Training and Technical Assistance Centers (T/TACs) and materials in the Resource Library. Also referenced was the Personnel Preparation

Development Funds that are federal dollars that flow to the Virginia Institute for Developmental Disabilities (VIDD).

Ms. Davidson inquired about the impact of the teacher licensure requirements for content area teachers. Dr. Trump, responded that it is being discussed and examined at the VDOE and will need to be addressed in the future.

Public Comment:

No public comment was made.

John Pleasants took the opportunity to announce his upcoming marriage on Valentine's Day. Congratulations to John and Kay!

Mr. Landes reported that he plans to attend all meetings regarding the revisions of the SOQ.

Update from the Superintendents

VSDB-Staunton

Dr. Armstrong described the steps taken to meet the Governor's Budget reductions. The agency has cut spending by 25% and is working within state budget limits given on a monthly basis. The budget at Staunton is also impacted by the use of temporary wage employees to address absenteeism (sickness & injuries). Currently the CARRS report shows that Staunton is at 46% of its spending capacity. Money is tight but staff morale is good. Dr. Armstrong presented a breakdown of the current enrollment at the school.

The girls' basketball team traveled to the Tennessee Classic tournament and won! Ten other deaf schools will come to Staunton to compete in the Mason/Dixon Tournament.

Currently, the Office of Planning and Budget is considering proposals for the Lead Paint abatement. Window replacement for the Swanson Building has been approved and will go to bid 1/8/03. The work will be done one floor at a time. Cost prohibits painting the rooms where windows are replaced which is needed. This would be an additional cost of \$25,000. The emergency heat project will add individual boiler units to each building but not air-conditioning. There is a contract with the Department of Corrections (closed in December) to continue providing steam for heat on campus through June. A new contract will have to be negotiated as the individual boiler units will not be completed for 1-½ years. The estimated cost is 1.9 million. Other repairs such as roofing, gutters and sprinkler systems have been completed.

Senator Blevins inquired about the admissions process for the schools. Dr. Armstrong explained that local school divisions must refer the student. Once a referral is received a formal admissions process is initiated. A parent and student visit is required and other activities for consideration of admission such as diagnostic testing. She explained that there has been an increase in the middle school numbers of enrollment.

The discussion turned to the topic of the history of provision of infant services from the two schools. The VSDBs are not required to provide infant services and budget cuts could impact staff funding for these services. There is an ongoing discussion with the Part C office staff, responsible for infant services in Virginia, about the process for making the VSDBs service providers within an interagency agreement. This may permit the flow of funds to the VSDB to offset the costs of providing services. All other service providers receive money from the lead agency.

VSDBM-Hampton

Dr. White feels the same issues impacting Staunton are evidenced at Hampton. She presented a detailed enrollment report noting that the report does not reflect all the disabilities a student may have if they come to the school with a single label of Hearing Impairment or Vision Impairment. The enrollment process must determine that the child has multiple disabilities. Currently Hampton does have a program for 3-5 year olds and also has historically provided infant services. The greatest challenge ahead for Hampton is also the budget. Maintenance Reserve funds are not included in the past budget which is a loss of \$252,000. There are not sufficient funds to complete the projects that have been initiated. A major difficulty has been the Office of Budget and Planning's approach of taking dollars from the Hampton budget to address the needs at the Staunton campus. Boilers and chillers have been installed, four roofs and two services roads have been completed as well as window replacement at Bradford Hall.

Other Matters:

Senator Maxwell stated that the April 15, 2002 letter written by Mr. Landes to Delegate S. Vance Wilkins, Jr offended him with regard to a description of activities regarding line item 138#14 (consolidation). Senator Maxwell believes that this portrayal of the situation was unwarranted. Mr. Landes responded that it was not his intention to offend anyone. Rather he is dedicated to improving services for all students at both schools.

Dr. White expressed her concern to Mr. Landes about his remarks at previous Commission meetings that the children at the VSDBM-H are not receiving appropriate education. She does not believe that statement is accurate and wishes to have an opportunity to address the matter at a future meeting.

The discussion concluded with review of the expected action of Commission members with regard to positions supported by the group vs. an individual's action. The meeting was then adjourned.

Actions Needed

Submission of a letter to Dr. DeMary regarding adoption of the National Agenda for the Blind by the Department of Education.

Determination between Dr. Trump and Senator Hanger about the intended purpose of the Commission for review of information about which local school divisions are placing students at the two schools.

Areas Identified for Next Meeting

Review information about the National Agenda for the Deaf

Presentation and discussion of the Synopsis of Consolidation Studies

Discussion with Dr. Lissa Power-deFur regarding speech services and regulatory definitions

Update on Infant Services

Provision of educational services at VSDBM-Hampton – Dr. White